



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Rules Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, September 12, 2022

6:00 PM

Others present: Brendan Salisbury – Legislative and Policy Analyst, Hannah Carrillo – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:02 PM by Chair Burnley and adjourned at 7:04 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis and Burnley), none against and 0 absent.

Roll Call

Present: Matthew McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis and City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr.

1. Order
(ID # [22-0021](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.

That this Council consider a rule that any item submitted to the Council requiring significant presentation materials must be submitted at least 48 hours in advance, lest it be laid on the table until the following meeting of the City Council.

Chair Burnley commented that this, and previous City Councils have been at a disadvantage when receiving materials with not enough time to review them. Liaison Carrillo offered the Administration’s response and asked for a definition of “significant presentation materials,” to which Chair Burnley responded that it would include PowerPoint presentations and large documents. Liaison Carrillo said the Administration recognizes the need for the City Council to have enough time to review materials and it is actively working to accomplish that. There is concern, however, that this may be untenable for city staff, e.g., PowerPoint presentations are often the last piece of information finalized, often just prior to meetings. She also noted that, on occasion, city staff is not given enough notice to prepare and distribute materials requested for committee meetings. The Administration’s preference is to not have this rule stand as it is too rigid. Councilor Davis commented that the rule really wouldn’t change the procedures of the Council, adding that the Administration has requested one week’s prior notice for city staff to appear at a meeting, and although this is not always adhered to, it is a useful guideline. Councilor McLaughlin understands both sides of the issue and also noted that the Council has the authority to leave an item on the table under its present rules. He also noted that there are mechanism in place to prevent legislation to be introduced and passed at the same meeting. Chair Burnley stated that members of the City Council have often commented on how late information is presented to them, only to let it continually happen. He thinks that it’s important to have

a written framework in place to address the frequency of this happening. Councilor McLaughlin commented that if the Council's rules are not being followed, another councilor should call attention to that error. He fails to see, however, how having this rule added will help the process.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

2. Order
(ID # [22-0162](#))

By Councilor Strezio
That the Administration provide paper copies for any reports before this Council for approval, unless Councilors have opted-out.

Legislative and Policy Analyst Brendan Salisbury commented that the goals of the city do not align with the desires of the Council in this matter, with respect to the environment. He noted that all Councilors have city issued laptops that are connected to the printer in the Committee Room, should they wish to print documents. Councilor Davis noted that he previously submitted an order which was just the opposite of this one and sought to limit the printing of meeting materials.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE PLACED ON FILE

3. Order
(ID # [22-0502](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Wilson and Councilor Davis
That this Council amend its rules to include gender neutral language rather than gender binary language such as "he/she".

Councilor Davis believes that this has already been done and Legislative and Policy Analyst Salisbury said this has, in fact, been done and incorporated into the Council's rules.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE PLACED ON FILE

4. Order
(ID # [22-0503](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.
That this Council amend Rule 31 to remove the mention of a mandatory prayer at the beginning of each Council meeting.

Chair Burnley put this forward because he would like to have a conversation about not saying a prayer at the beginning of each Council meeting. Legislative and Policy Analyst Salisbury clarified that the referenced rule is now Rule 32 and that it does not include the requirement for a prayer. Chair Burnley commented that perhaps the language should be amended to say that the Council should refrain from beginning with a prayer or anything of the like. Councilor McLaughlin stated that he is fine with not having the requirement for a prayer, but he personally takes comfort in having his abbreviated version of the Serenity Prayer read at the beginning of Council meetings and doesn't think a rule to prohibit the reading of a prayer is necessary. He went on to say that he feels the option should be left to the will of the Council Chair.

Councilor Davis said that he doesn't want to go down the road of saying what the Council is not going to do and this feels like this may cross a

procedural line that could get messy. Chair Burnley expressed his confusion about having a rule stating what is not permissible. He also expressed concern about leaving the option to include a prayer up to the Council Chair. He believes in separation of church and state and feels it's an abdication of the Rules Committee's function to say that it will not enter into a territory and simply leave it up to the discretion of whoever happens to be in a position of power.

Councilor Davis commented that if a rule were passed prohibiting the mention of religiosity, then the Pledge of Allegiance would be prohibited from being said at Council meetings. Councilor McLaughlin said he doesn't feel that a rule change is necessary, adding that this conversation is a waste of time and not pivotal to the future of the City Council. Chair Burnley believes that leaving the choice up to the Council Chair is an oversight in the rules. He acknowledged that that his committee colleagues don't share his opinion on this matter. He wants to keep the item in committee because he doesn't think the conversation is over. Councilor Davis moved to place the item on file since the rule # in the Order is incorrect. Chair Burnley asked if he submitted a similar item with the correct rule number and language about prayer, would that be acceptable or viewed as resubmitting and item that was already defeated and Councilor Davis responded by saying that there would be a distinction between them since the item before the committee now is not actionable, due to the incorrect rule # being referenced.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE PLACED ON FILE